

CHALLENGING THE ACADEMY, SOUTH-SOUTH COLLABORATIONS, NEW PRACTICES, OTHER ANTHROPOLOGIES

The World Anthropologies Network project, WAN, is eminently about pluralizing anthropological theory and practice. The network's activities to this date have been oriented to maintaining this open-ended character of the project, while trying to give it shape. The results so far have included the emergence of small WAN sites here and there, mostly still in Latin America, a few in Europe and Asia. Some of the recent tasks the network have taken on have actually been prompted by face-to-face sessions with anthropology students—most of them undergraduate—in Colombia and Argentina. In these encounters, students have suggested practical actions, such as the development of course syllabi and bibliographies, some of which are already posted on the website. We include reports from these two meetings at the end of this issue.

This issue starts with two collective statements on WAN already published on paper. The first is a recent text printed in the *Anthropology Newsletter* in the US and its Spanish translation. The second is the French version of the first collective text by the WAN group published in *Social Anthropology* in 2003 and also included in the first issue of this electronic journal.

The second section includes four articles (two of them already published) and four work-in-progress pieces. It starts with two pieces by participants in the WAN collective. The first is a personal account and analysis by Eeva Berglund on the conditions imposed on the British academy in recent years by the ensemble of practices and regulations named by Marilyn Strathern and collaborators as “audit culture.” Highlighting the productivism, drive to self-exploitation, and turn towards corporatization and managerialism that have often accompanied this trend, Eeva lucidly discusses the implications of these troubling trends for long-standing anthropological principles, personal choices, and ethical positions. In the second piece, Sandy Toussaint contextualizes Australian anthropology within national cultural and political shifts of recent years, particularly after the so-called “Mabo decision” of 1992. Confronted with some of the same pressures outlined by Berglund, along with demands arising from new subjects and topics, Australian anthropologists have responded in multiple ways, yet these are still to build up to a substantial critique of anthropology's foundations of the sort WAN envisages, in Sandy's view.

“Anthropologies of difference,” by Yasmeen Arif (Researcher at the high-profile Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi) queries the notion of “anthropological encounter” as found in dominant anthropological fieldwork; at the same time, she attempts to recover this concept by building on an uncommon case: An Indian anthropologist trained in India (who is most times expected to remain at home for field research) doing fieldwork in an anthropological location commonly reserved for anthropologists from the metropolis, in this case Beirut. This “lateral connectivity,” she contends, can become important for world anthropological approaches especially if they aim to move beyond a pure pattern of opposition (to the metropolitan varieties). Understanding anthropology as the systematic study of diverse human sociality, Yasmeen calls for anthropologies of difference (building on Deleuze) that are not so mediated by imperial cartographies, given that they enable other constellations of observer/observed, outsider/insider. While this does not solve all problems, one wonders if this form of South-South collaboration could be a route for anthropology to finally exit from what Trouillot called “the

savage slot.” We find Arif’s project of linking anthropologies in India and Latin America from an explicit South-South inter-epistemic dialogue perspective hopeful and worth pursuing.

Finally, the paper by Myriam Jimeno, one of the most established anthropologists in Colombia and Latin America, undertakes a simultaneous reflection on both the relation between Colombian anthropologists and the people they work with in the country—a relation which is always politicized and often wrought with tensions, since it almost invariably involves the struggles of different social sectors—and between Colombian anthropology and global, particularly dominant, anthropologies. If the former issue is predicated on an assumed lack of boundaries between anthropological practice and the social action of the anthropologist as citizen, the latter is often marked by challenges and reinventions of metropolitan concepts to such an extent that it amounts to a significantly different knowledge production.

The next section features four works in progress that we believe are very exciting, hence the slightly longer commentary. The first two are slightly revised versions of papers presented at the conference “Informatics Goes Global: Methods at a Crossroads,” convened by anthropologist David Hakken and colleagues at the School of Informatics, Indiana University, Bloomington, March 3–4, 2006. Taken together, these papers point at the challenges and possibilities entailed by new information and communication technologies (ICTs) when doing ethnographic work. Although these two papers involve work with indigenous peoples on the design of websites, we believe many of the questions they raise would easily apply to cases with groups in many parts of the world involving a variety of technologies (e.g., digital video, websites, net.art). As the papers demonstrate, the questions go well beyond technical competencies, literacy, and the “digital gap.” For David Delgado Shorter (“How Do You Say ‘Search Engine’ In Your Language?”: Translating Indigenous World View into Digital Ethnographies”), working with Yaome (Yaqui) indigenous people on both sides of the US-Mexico Border, one the key issues is how to build collaborative relations under conditions that involve different aesthetics, epistemologies, notions of property and commons, often divided opinions and conflicting tribal groups or authorities, poor material conditions (e.g., unsteady electricity supply), even unprecedented questions about the disciplinary practice of “human subjects review.” “What does ‘technology in Indian country’ mean”—he asks, echoing the work of Guillermo Gómez Peña—in the context of a widespread politics of exclusion?

Some of these questions are also addressed by Kimberly Christen in her work with the Warumungu Aboriginal group in Central Australia (“Changing the Default: Taking Aboriginal Systems of Accountability Seriously”). Christen foregrounds issues of intellectual and cultural property rights, an area in which anthropologists are contributing actively. Drawing on her digital collaboration with Warumungu artists and community leaders, she discusses the shortcomings of concepts of “traditional ownership” and the role of digital technologies in preservation (via the construction of websites and DVDs by the anthropologist with indigenous collaboration). Christen’s strongest conclusion is that what takes place is an overlap of cultural conceptions and practices of ownership and cultural management, with modern “copyright” or “creative commons” (or Copyleft, as in the case of this journal) as possible idioms among others. One of her more insightful concepts, in our view, is that property can perhaps be best thought about not in terms of ownership (particularly individual), but of kinds of authorship enacted by networks of ethical/political practices and social relations, of which the anthropologists would of course be a part. This “distributional” approach to property, she argues, is more appropriate to the actual situation of many indigenous communities and enables a different politics of collaboration with them by the anthropologist.

Surely many of the questions raised by these two papers have been part of anthropology for a long time, but some of them are new. Even the concept of “web-based ethnographies” suggests new practices. How does one “download” or “encode” indigenous cultural contents into a digital medium without betraying their different linguistic and epistemic logic? How does one render place, territory,

ritual—or respect the desire for secrecy about them, whenever this is the case—from this perspective? These were questions discussed at the session on “Engaging Code Openly” at which both papers were presented. For now, we want to highlight that these new practices present opportunities for collaboration and engagement that both pose challenges to the more detached practice of anthropology that has seemingly become common place in many quarters, particularly in the US, and point to possibilities for other anthropologies and anthropology otherwise.

We also see WAN as embracing the transformational thrust of those who are working on social movements (including alter/anti-globalization movements) from anthropological stances. Several PhD students at Chapel Hill and elsewhere are in fact envisioning their dissertation research in terms of linking up social movements’ decolonial projects with the non-hegemonic anthropologies advocated by WAN. This is the case with the papers by Maria Isabel Casas Cortés and Elena Yehia that follow. In the first of these papers, Maribel establishes a conversation between three ongoing projects: WAN; the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality project; and what seems to be a growing trend of *activist research* among social movements. This trend has actually been identified recently in various places and movements; one of these places is the Social Movements Working Group (SMWG) at UNC, Chapel Hill (<http://www.unc.edu/smwg/>), an interdisciplinary effort spearheaded by faculty and PhD students in anthropology and which also includes participants from geography and sociology, in operation since Fall 2003. One of the group’s most important contributions so far has been the idea that social movements have to be taken seriously as knowledge producers in their own right. In her paper, Maribel—a founding member of SMWG—presents one of the most interesting cases in the world not only of “knowledge production” but, more explicitly, of “activist research,” the Madrid group *Precarias a la Deriva*. In doing so, she builds bridges between the three projects in question, particularly their respective contributions to decolonial thinking, including feminist research in the case of *Precarias*. Based on the very interesting methodological innovations of this group, she adumbrates the possibility of a “decolonial ethnography.”

Elena Yehia’s paper establishes a conversation between two different frameworks: Actor-network theory (ANT), particularly the most recent works of Law, Mol and Latour, on the one hand, and the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality project (MCD). Starting with the question: “how can one do decolonizing ethnographies of social movements’ decolonizing practices?,” she suggests that both ANT and MCD contribute to decolonizing knowledge, particularly through their innovative conceptualization of modernity, and that they do so in complementary, yet mutually probing, ways. From ANT’s notion of “multiple ontologies,” for instance, she enunciates the idea of the ethnography of ontological encounters, which she develops with the help of notions of performance and dialogical ethnographies. From MCD, she envisions the exciting idea of ethnographies of encounters bringing together distinct geo-political locations (distinct locations in the modern/colonial world system), such as movements in the Arab World and in Latin America. Finally, Elena poses pointed questions about MCD, including the issue of the implications of decoding subaltern knowledges or, alternatively, refusing to decode them; and the limitations of the project due to its being located largely in the academy and conducted in academic language—that is, its inevitable locatedness within modernity.

The dossier includes introductions to three recent volumes that broach many of the issues central to the WAN project. Many of the topics discussed in these introductions point in similar directions as WAN, others present interesting tensions with our project. Aleksandar Bošković’s edited volume (in press at this point), *Other Anthropologies* explicitly addresses discussions of “indigenous” or “non-Western,” “central/peripheral,” “anthropologies of the South,” and “world anthropologies.” It includes chapters on anthropologies which have often been placed in the position of “other,” such as those from Russia, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Kenya, Turkey, Argentina (chapter by Rosana Guber from WAN), Cameroon, Japan, Yugoslavia, Norway, Mexico (chapter by Esteban Krotz, also from WAN), and Brazil, plus Postscripts by George Marcus and Ulf Hannerz.

Finally, the issue ends with reports from two recent anthropology congresses in Latin America, Colombia's National Anthropology Congress held in August 2005 (with Alcida Rita Ramos, professor of Anthropology at the University of Brasilia and associated with the WAN Project as one of three keynote speakers), and the First Latin American Anthropology Congress, held in Rosario, Argentina in July of 2005, which featured a session on WAN. Among the paper presenters in this session were WAN members Susana Narotzky and Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (organizers), Alcida Ramos from Brazil, Rosana Guber from Argentina, and Estaban Krotz from Mexico.

This issue was organized by Arturo Escobar, Eduardo Restrepo and Sandy Toussaint.